



Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
www.iowadnr.com

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Editor: Mick Klemesrud, 515/281-8653
mick.klemesrud@dnr.state.ia.us

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IOWA LAKES ARE QUICKLY LOSING ICE

CLEAR LAKE - Ice anglers who choose to venture on Iowa lakes should use extreme caution. Many lakes that had frozen last week are now opening back up. The extended weather forecast for north Iowa has high temperatures in the middle to upper 40s and lows barely below the freezing mark. High temperatures in the low 50s are predicted Wednesday through Friday for northwest Iowa.

If anglers choose to go out, they should take plenty of safety gear. Make sure to carry a throwable flotation device, 50 feet of rope, ice picks and a spud bar. Use the spud bar to test the ice strength and avoid off-colored ice or dark ice. It would also be wise to not go out alone.

“What began as a nice, first layer of quality ice has deteriorated to the point where ice is breaking away from shore at some lakes. The warm weather, wind and rain is quickly eating away the ice,” said Mick Klemesrud with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. “I’m afraid conditions will continue to be dicey until we get a significant cold spell.”

Rather than tiptoeing out on a lake with poor ice conditions, anglers should opt for open water fishing in Iowa rivers, trout streams, farm ponds or on the Mississippi River. The tailwaters below Lock and Dam 10 on the Mississippi River has been for

walleye and sauger. There is plenty of trout holding in the streams this time of year to challenge anglers.

“There is plenty of good fishing opportunities available, just not ice fishing opportunities,” Klemesrud said.

For more information, contact Klemesrud at 515-281-8653.

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LODGE RESERVATION LAUNCH A GO FOR FRIDAY

DES MOINES - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources will launch its lodge reservation system at 9 a.m., CST, on December 15. The 24 day-use lodges are popular for weddings, family reunions and other parties.

“We are excited to provide this new service to our customers,” says Sherry Arntzen with the state parks bureau. “We’ve had a number of phone calls the past two weeks from customers wanting to make sure they knew when the system would be open for business.”

Reservations will be accepted online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at www.reserveiaparks.com or through the reservation call center 1-877-IAPARKS (877-427-2757) during reservation business hours. Reservations will be accepted up to 12 months in advance and payment methods include credit cards.

Each lodge reservation webpage will include photographs of the facilities, a listing of amenities (kitchens, restrooms, furniture, heat, etc.), fee and season information, rules and procedures regarding lodge rental.

For more information about lodge reservations, visit www.exploreiowaparks.com and click on “lodges/shelters” on the sidebar menu.

For more information, contact Arntzen at 515-242-6233.

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[electronic photo available]

ABUNDANT COTTONTAILS PROVIDE WINTER FUN

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

CLEAR LAKE - I began hunting when I was ten. Like most of the kids I knew, my first shotgun was a hand-me-down, .410 single shot. Nothing to inspire a collector, the gun's plain grained wooden stock had been snapped in half at the pistol grip. The ancient pieces had been currently reunited by means of a single, large diameter wood screw, now buried beneath several layers of black friction tape.

But the gun did have its virtues. It was lightweight and although somewhat rusty, the barrel did shoot true. In spite of the weapon's limited, single shot firepower, it did manage to harvest its fair share of game. In most cases, the word *game* meant cottontail rabbits.

Finding rabbits was rarely a challenge. Regardless of whether we chose to hunt brushy fence lines, briar patches, cattail sloughs, or farmstead windbreaks, we always found cottontails and plenty of them. They were everywhere.

Neither myself nor any of my hunting buddy classmates had the slightest qualms about shooting rabbits "on the sit". Stalking as close as possible, we always tried for a head-shot. It meant instant death and less ruined meat.

Most of our shots, however, were taken as close range cottontails burst from beneath snow lodged cattails or from the weedy intersection of a Back Forty fence line. We managed to connect with about half of those high-speed runners. Although these rabbits were just as dead as the "sitters", their meat required a bit more inspection at the dinner table.

Those early hunts took place in the era preceding fast food restaurants and microwave ovens. Back then, nearly everyone's Mom knew how to cook cottontails to perfection, and most could employ a wide variety of recipes while doing so. No one yet realized that, in addition to being delicious, the animal's white meat was also low in fat and cholesterol. Now that I think about it, we didn't even know that there was such a thing as cholesterol. All we knew was that baked, fried, or stewed, rabbit tasted good --- especially after a hard day of tromping through knee deep snow with a couple of your school buddies.

Cottontail rabbits still abound in Iowa. Generally speaking, the farther south you travel, the more plentiful they become. The sharp contrast is that most hunters don't bother to pursue them anymore. During recent decades, cottontail hunters have declined by more than two thirds. Only 32,000 of the state's 144,000 licensed small game hunters still chase rabbits. Those who do apparently still take the activity seriously and annually bag around 260,000 cottontails.

There are many reasons for the cottontail's decline in popularity. One is that --- like doctors --- many contemporary hunters have become highly specialized in their pursuits. Free time is limited and it's hard for rabbits to compete against more glamorous species such as deer, turkeys, or Canada geese.

That's unfortunate. Iowa cottontails still represent an abundant and extremely renewable natural resource. For those who capitalize on the opportunities, winter rabbit hunting continues to provide a high quality outdoor experience. And if your aim is true, there's plenty of good eating to boot.

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DNR TO PROMOTE SHOOTING SPORTS, BOATING EDUCATION

DES MOINES - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has created two positions to work with the growing participation in shooting sports and boating. The new coordinators will work closely with hunter education instructors, conservation officers and with recreation safety officers.

Ben Berka, of Huxley, began as the shooting sports coordinator in October. Berka was president of the Iowa State University trap and skeet club while in college, then after college served as a coach. He began teaching clay target shooting and wing shooting in 2002 and developed youth programs in the sport. Berka had been a geneticist with Pioneer Hi-Bred International for the past eight years, prior to his new position.

One of his top priorities is to develop and improve state owned and private shooting ranges and to develop shooting sports programs with an emphasis on teaching to youth. "We would like to increase participation in shooting sports and hunting by developing target shooting programs and shooting facilities," Berka said.

Berka said his programs do not replace hunter education. He would be offering a curriculum teaching archery, rifle and shotgun shooting equally and hopes to work with Phys-Ed teachers and community volunteers to develop after school programs.

He is also looking for volunteers interested in promoting shooting sports and leading local programs. Contact Berka at 515-281-0140 or by e-mail at ben.berka@dnr.state.ia.us for more details.

Susan Hager, of Ames, was hired as the boating education coordinator in October, marking her return to the Iowa DNR after a four year hiatus. Hager was a conservation officer in Johnson County for 10 years, ending in 2002. Hager had been a land ranger with the New Mexico State Parks system before returning to Iowa in July.

Hager will be pulling boating education instructors together to get everyone current with their certification and pass along the new boating safety information. She will be working the boat shows and promoting the mandatory boater education for 12 through 17 year olds.

“I want to take the boater education program the same direction as the hunter education program,” Hager said. She has set goals of reducing boating crashes, getting Iowans to wear lifejackets and at the same time working to pull together pleasure boaters, anglers and hunters, as well as the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and the U.S. Power Squadron.

“We have a lot of different boating constituencies out there and my goal is to get us all working together, pulling in the same direction,” Hager said.

For more information, contact Berka at 515-281-0140 or Hager at 515-281-0122.

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GIFT IDEAS FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

DES MOINES – Filling out the gift list of the outdoor enthusiast this holiday season need not be difficult. Sign them up for a boating safety course or hunter education course.

Statistics show individuals who complete a safety education course reduce their chance of being injured in a boating or hunting related incident.

If the list is long, consider these gift ideas.

- Subscription to **Iowa Outdoors** magazine [available at www.iowadnr.com] for the latest and greatest information on the hunting, fishing and camping scene in Iowa
- Camping coupons book [available from any Iowa state park] offer a discount on electric campsites in Iowa state parks
- A 2007 hunting/fishing license
- Lifejacket [for the kids too] or throwable floatation device
- First-aid kit
- Emergency kit for the boat [flares, signal mirror, whistle, etc.] camper or car
- New solid blaze orange colored vest, hat and gloves
- New solid blaze orange colored game bag
- Ice picks for the ice angler
- A tree stand safety harness
- Toolkit and spare parts for boats
- Gun cleaning kit
- Hand-held GPS unit
- Rescue throwbag
- Kill switch leash to kill the boat engine if boater falls overboard
- Camping/ campfire cookbook
- Dry bag

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A GIFT OF NATURE

Find the perfect gift for the person who loves the outdoors and avoid the hassles of holiday shopping by giving a gift of Iowa's nature from the State Forest Nursery.

To promote planting native trees and shrubs for songbird and wildlife habitat, state foresters with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources worked with several environmental and outdoor organizations to create five packets of native seedlings for purchase this holiday season. Delivery is in the spring, and gift recipients will receive a certificate for the holiday.

The native tree and shrub packets available are:

- Songbird Packet has 20 trees (8 to 24 inches tall) for \$20, that is designed for a larger backyard habitat project. The Songbird Packet includes two bur oaks, two white pines, four wild plum, four chokecherry, four gray dogwoods and four serviceberry. This packet is recommended by Audubon Iowa.
- Create-A- Packet has 200 trees (8 to 24 inches tall) for \$90. Create your own wildlife packet by choosing four different tree or shrub species in units of 50 plants. This is great for small acreage owners who have one-half to one acre to plant.
- Turkey Packet has 200 trees (8 to 24 inches tall) for \$90. The Turkey Packet provides need mast trees for that one-half to one acre planting and includes 50 bur oak, 50 white oak, 50 pin oak and 50 gray dogwoods and is recommended by the Iowa Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation.
- Pheasant Packet has 200 trees (8 to 24 inches tall) for \$90. The Pheasant Packet provides food and winter cover and includes 50 redcedar, 50 wild plums, 50 ninebark and 50 gray dogwoods and is recommended by the Iowa Pheasants Forever chapters.
- Quail Packet has 200 trees (8 to 24 inches tall) for \$90. This Quail Packet provides food and winter cover and includes 100 wild plum and 100 gray dogwood and is recommended by DNR wildlife biologists

There is still time to receive a gift certificate for the holidays by placing an order via the phone, e-mail or mail by December 20. The gift certificate can be sent to the recipient or to the purchaser.

These packets are available for purchase and make a wonderful house warming gift. Once ordered the trees and shrubs will be delivered between early April and mid May. To order or for more information, call the State Forest Nursery at 1-800-865-2477

Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Fax at 515-233-1131 or go on line to www.iowadnr.com/forestry/. Do not send any money, a bill will be sent later. Checks, VISA and MasterCard are accepted.

For information about tree planting programs and assistance in Iowa, check out www.iowatreeplanting.com.

For more information, contact John Walkowiak, chief, Iowa DNR forestry bureau, at 515-242-5966, or by e-mail at john.walkowiak@dnr.state.ia.us.

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2007 HUNTING, FISHING LICENSES ON SALE DEC. 15

DES MOINES – Hunting and fishing licenses for 2007 go on sale on Dec. 15. The cost of a resident hunting license and fishing license is \$17.50 each, unchanged from 2006. The 2006 licenses expire on Jan. 10, 2007.

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ICE FISHING CLINICS SCHEDULED

DES MOINES – A number of free ice fishing clinics are scheduled around Iowa this winter, pending favorable ice conditions. Activities vary at each clinic, but participants can expect to learn basic safety tips, fishing techniques and bait presentations while on the ice. Participants should prepare to be outdoors for an extended amount of time. Hats and mittens are essential along with a good pair of boots.

Contact the clinic for more information.

Date	Clinic Type	Location	Phone
Dec. 28	Youth	Hurstville Fishing Lake, Maquoketa	563-652-3783
Jan. 6	Youth	Lake Pahoja, Larchwood	712-472-2217
Jan. 6	Youth	Thorpe Park's Lake Catherine, Forest City	641-565-3390
Jan. 13	Youth	F.W. Kent Park, Tiffin	319-645-1011
Jan. 13	Youth	Pinicon Ridge Park, Central City	319-892-6489
Jan. 20	Youth	Willow Creek, Ocheyedun	712-754-3648
Jan. 20	General	Eldred Sherwood Park, Goodell	641-923-2720
Jan. 20	Youth	Don Williams Park, Ogden	515-795-2809
Jan. 27	General	Fontana Park, Hazleton	319-238-1378
Jan. 27	Youth	Lake Manawa, Council Bluffs	712-366-0220
Jan. 27	Youth	Mile Hill Lake, Glenwood	712-527-9685
Jan. 27	Youth	Swan Lake State Park, Carroll	712-792-4614
Jan. 27	Youth	McFarland Park Lake, Ames	515-232-2516
Jan. 27	Youth	Russell Wildlife Area Pond, Oskaloosa	641-673-9327
Jan. 27	Youth	Criss Cove, Winterset	515-462-3536
Jan. 28	Youth	McGowen Rec. & Wildlife Area, Bloomfield	641-664-2572
Jan. 28	Youth	Central Park Lake, Anamosa	563-487-3541
Feb. 3	Youth	Great Western Park, Manning	712-792-4614
Feb. 11	Youth	F.W. Kent Park, Tiffin	319-645-1011

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